DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 254 853 CS 208 803

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TITLE How to Teach Writing without Knowing the Meaning of AWK.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English (20th, Houston, TX, January 31-February 2, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Content Area Writing; Educational Improvement; High Schools; Inservice Teacher Education; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Program Descriptions; Teaching Methods; Writing Improvement; *Writing Instruction

ABSTRACT

A Texas high school has initiated a writing across the curriculum program in which an English instructor first taught the writing process to 10 colleagues from social studies and science. The first session brought out concerns, questions, and frustrations and laid the foundation for trust and understanding in the working relationship. Actual training began with the second session, which included setting goals, considering more extensive use of essay questions to promote one type of writing, examining the writing process, and practicing prewriting activities. The third session concentrated on writing as a thinking and learning tool, and the fourth allowed small-group collaboration on specific areas as well as departmental efforts and sharing across the discipline lines. Lessons demonstrated practical procedures for the writing process, the use of writing as a learning tool, writing designed as an integral step in accomplishing existing course objectives, and increased potential for motivation, challenge, and student participation in learning. The ultimate goal is to have writing as an integral part of every discipline, district-wide. Initiators of the program have learned the following: (1) an appointed task force has the advantage of a small, select group, but the disadvantage of limited involvement through departments; (2) released days for the participants are a definite advantage; (3) teachers must actually perform the writing activities themselves, from prewriting through evaluation; and (4) the basic sequencing, from essays to thinking/learning/comprehending, is sound. Twelve references are listed. (HTH)

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How to Teach Writing without Knowing the Meaning of AWK

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With today's concern for quality education and a growing commitment to thinking and writing skills, Writing across the Curriculum is a fairly easy concept to sell to administrators, to fellow English teachers (who have supported the idea for a long time), and to colleagues in other disciplines.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education has placed development of the ability to use language first among its recommendations for content changes. More explicitly, Ernest Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation states: "Writing is the most important and most neglected skill in school. It is through clear writing that clear thinking can be developed." The Foundation's High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America continues, "Writing should be taught in every classroom."

In "Writing as a Mode of Learning," Janet Emig offers a most convincing rationale for writing in all curriculum areas. "Writing," she states, "represents a unique mode of learning.... Writing serves learning uniquely because writing as process-and-product possesses a cluster of attributes that correspond

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uniquely to certain powerful learning strategies."

In keeping with these findings and concerns, and in keeping with our own awareness of the needs of our students, Spring Woods High School has initiated a Writing across the Curriculum program. Our basic beliefs parallel those suggested by Tchudi and Yates in Teaching Writing in the Content Areas: Senior High School (pp. 6-7) and by Glatthorn in Writing in the Schools (p. 45):

> Writing about a subject improves students' understanding of content.
>
> Content writing improves students' writing abilities and develops all language skills.
>
> Teaching writing teaches thinking: a discernible link exists between clear writing and clear thinking.

Perhaps the most helpful information to share with you is what we have done in our school with the hope that you can adapt it to your needs.

As an English teacher with special interest in writing, I was permitted to teach the writing process to ten fellow teachers, five from social studies and five from science. They, much more able to apply their newly acquired skills in their own fields, would then share it with others in their departments.

Our first session, although only an hour and a half in length, brought out concerns, questions, and frustrations and laid the foundation for trust and understanding in our working relationship. The agenda for that session included:

1. Free writing on questions, concerns, and attitudes toward the proposed program.
2. Sharing of those concerns. This format provided a discussion base rather than a more closed lecture approach.

The second session, scheduled for all day on release time, began the actual training. The day's activities centered on the following plan:

1. Setting goals.
2. Consideration of more extensive use of essay questions to promote one type of writing. This discussion included clarification of a variety of command terms such as describe, compare/contrast, define. (We used How to Take an Essay Test from Stack the Deck, Inc. as a source.) We also worked on clear wording of questions and evaluation guidelines.
3. Overview of the writing process.
4. Practice with prewriting activities applicable to classroom situations.

Our third meeting, also an all-day session, concentrated on writing, not as finished product to be used for evaluation, but as a thinking and learning tool. The group addressed these skills:

1. How to use writing as an introduction to a lesson, as a monitoring technique, or as closure for a day's lesson

or unit: that is, to see writing not as an addition to an already crowded curriculum, but as a means of increasing teaching effectiveness.

2. How to use letters (real or fictionalized), journal entries, and summary writing as continous learning records or review sources.
3. How to evaluate papers with emphasis on content by using holistic or primary trait scoring techniques.

Task force members, eager at this point to work on actual classroom materials, asked for and were granted a third release day. The most exciting of all our time together, this work day allowed small-group collaboration on specific areas as well as departmental efforts, and sharing across the discipline lines. The results are creative and exciting. Lessons demonstrate (1) practical step-by-step procedures using the writing process, (2) the use of writing as a learning tool, (3) writing designed as an integral step in accomplishing existing course objectives, and (4) increased potential for motivation, challenge, and student participation in learning.

Looking ahead, we have set our goals:

1. To deal with finer points of writing.
2. To introduce the task force to methods of peer editing and revision.
3. To stablize the command terms for essay answers across the social studies, science, and English departments.

4. To provide staff development programs to teach colleagues the potential of writing in all disciplines.
5. To establish support networks among teachers for help and encouragement in initiating the program.

The ultimate goal will be to have writing as an integrated part of every discipline, not only in our school, but on a district-wide basis.

I would suggest at this point the following considerations from what we have learned:

1. An appointed task force has the advantage of a small, select group but the disadvantage of limited involvement through the departments.
2. Release days are a definite plus. Large blocks of time permit writing activities and uninterrupted work time.
3. Teachers, although they may be hesitant, much actually perform the writing activities themselves---from prewriting, to writing, to editing and evaluating.
4. Our basic sequencing has proven sound. I suggest working with essay answers first since that is already a familiar road and then moving into thinking/learning/comprehending connections and into more creative writing assignments.

Teachers in other disciplines seem willing and eager to incorporate more writing into their classes when they realize that poor results previously experienced in writing assignments can often be corrected if audience, purpose, and expectations are clarified, and when they are assured that they can evaluate writing effectively without knowing such mystical symbols as FRAG. and AWK.

We as English teachers are already familiar with numerous sources dealing with the writing process and the methods of teaching and evaluating writing in our classrooms. The following books and articles, specifically on writing in content areas, will provide you with additional information to share with your colleagues in other fields.

Emig, Janet. "Writing as a Mode of Learning." College Composition and and Communication. Vol. 28 (1977), pp. 122-28.

Fulwiler, Toby. "How Well Does Writing across the Curriculum Work?" College English. Vol. 46, No. 2. February 1984, pp. 113-25.

Glatthorn, Allan A. Writing in the Schools. Virginia: NAASP, 1981.

Herrington, Anne J. "Writing to Learn: Writing across the Disciplines." College English. Vol. 43, No. 4. April 1981, pp. 379-387.

Howie, Sherry Hill. A Guidebook for Teaching Writing in the Content Areas. Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1984.

Maeroff, Gene I. "Teaching of Writing Gets New Push." (Related articles) New York Times, January 15, 1984.

Shadiow, Linda. "Every Teacher as a Writing Teacher: A Definition of Terms." NASSP Bulletin, April 1981, pp. 47-53.

Tchudi, Stephen N. and Joanne Yates. Teaching Writing in the Content Areas: Senior High School. Washington D.C.: NEA, 1983.

Tschumy, Ruth D. "Writing across the Curriculum---What's in a Name?" NASSP Bulletin, May 1982, pp. 63-70.

Wilks, Sandra. "Clipping Writing Problems." School and Community, May 1981, pp. 22-23.

Woolever, Kristin R. "Is Writing a Technical Skill or a Means of Humanistic Inquiry." The Chronicle of Higher Learning. Vol. 22. July 20, 1981, p. 40.

Yates, Joanne M. Research Implications for Writing in the Content Areas. NEA, 1984. (The overview section includes a bibliography of 166 related sources.)